HOTTER THAN JULY

It CAN happen here: Pete Makowski (words) and Ross Halfin (pictures) roast on the road with RAINBOW

"Most of the gaudy aspects of our future shocked world — the sexuality, the titillation of forbidden pleasures, the triumph of money over taste, the fascination with travel — are seen in their harshest light on a rock and roll tour by a giant band."
— (Taken from the introduction to 'Billion Dollar Baby' by Bob Greene)

"The crowd's going wild
And you feel so alive
You could stand up and take this all night"
— from 'Spotlight Kid' — (Blackmore/Glover)

"There are people out to get bands like us. We're a part of a tradition a lot of the media would like to see disappear. The stupid thing is that if we suddenly vanished off the face of this earth, there'd be no one for them to slag off and then they'd still keep complaining."
— Ritchie Blackmore, July 1981

THE 'BANDS like us' Mr B is talking about are what some bozo smart ass critiques refer to as the 'dinosaurs of rock' — the big league. To me Rainbow are a part of a dying tradition, a five star HM group who are still flying the flag for faded spirits like Zeppelin and co.

So what's the argument?

Is it because Rainbow haven't got what is referred to as street credibility, maaan?

Is it because they still go out of their way to instill a dash of glamour into their performances and they actually believe in *entertaining* their audience? Kids who are from *The Streets* and lead a less than inspiring lifestyle.

Getting away from London and going to the almost sombre grey surroundings of Leeds was quite a refreshing experience in as much as it was nice to get away from the jaded cynicism of the 'city scene' which can eventually affect you no matter how hard you try to fight it.

It's a real treat to see a hall full of Heavy Metal Kids literally exuding genuine enthusiasm, pumping out buckets of energy. These people firmly believe in the motto 'Fuck Art, Let's Dance' which is normally seen splashed across the T-shirts worn by the trendier reptiles who can be seen regularly crawling up and down the more fashionable spots of London Town. These kids mean it.

When the lathes stop turning and the factories and cash register existence grinds to a halt, these chillun' go out into the night with one sole purpose on their mind — having a good time.

With an existence rooted in harsh reality and a future gravely in the shadow of doubt people round here don't fork out their hard earned akkers to see and hear about something they already know about.

Some of us actually want to be whisked away on that magic carpet ride and become a part of this rock and roll fantasy if only just for one night, see something that is inspiring and enjoyable. That's entertainment and this is where Rainbow fulfil their contract with the kidz.

"The giant rock and roll tours represented a fantasy life that millions of people all over the world thought about and, at least during wistful moments, longed to be part of, if only to affirm that someone was living that way."
Bob Greene — 'Billion Dollar Baby'

"The whole idea is to deliver what money can't buy"
— Bruce Springsteen ('Rolling Stone Book Of Loose Quotes')

"I try to keep a little class in the music, which is why we sometimes get into a few little problems"
— Ritchie Blackmore

WHILE most of the critics are busy slamming Rainbow with the same hackneyed/cliche ridden attacks, the band seem to be getting more popular as the years go by.

To be honest sometimes I find it hard writing about a group I know too well (which sounds like a bunch of egotistical crap but is true) and even from my unashamedly biased/syncophantic view I must admit there have been a few moments where I wasn't quite sure how I felt about the group and certain attitudes..

But there have always been a couple of things that have remained consistent with Rainbow providing an anchor for the more dodgier scenes that have occurred during their volatile lifespan.

Firstly and predictably there's my never ending fascination for Blackmore, who in my mind embodies the true spirit of stardom and also happens to be one of the finest guitarists around.

Next and equally important is the standard of music and musicianship that has always been top notch. They also have THE EDGE which you can only find in major British groups like The Who, The Stones, even The Pistols at their peak (absolutely no musical comparisons before you reach for your pens). With so many fierce egos and predominant personalities on one platform it's almost impossible to predict what's going to happen next.

It's something that transcends that snail-like sliminess usually found in American bands who are too bloddy professional. In groups like Rainbow you get disasters and miracles and it's a form of musical masochism that I find enjoyable.

It was this edge that made itself very apparent in Leeds at the first of two sell out shows at The Queens Hall. As the people who attended already know THE EDGE unveiled itself in its fieriest manifestation when Blackmore and Bobby Rondinelli walked offstage on that eventful (to say the least) Tuesday night and didn't reappear for what seemed like a lifetime.

And it was obvious from the stunned faces of the remaining members, road crew/management and audience that no one knew what was going on and we were all equally in the dark — and as dumb as it sounds I found the whole thing to be quite exciting . . .

But hold up, let's take a couple of paces in reverse and begin at the beguine which happened to be Sunday July 12 — my birthday! It was on this day I found myself on a train headed for Leeds with my partner in good times, the man with camera eyes Ross 'The Boss' Halfin.

Recovering from the shock of being in the quarter of a century category and a night on the tiles with Phil Lynott and crew, my shaking hand was now on the receiving end of a scotch and coke while my bloodshot eyes were being blinded by Halfin's tropical dickie dirt.

GLUG GLUG CHUGGA CHUG DOWN THE LINE WE WENT . . .

Hooray, I thought to myself, away we go from the riot torn Kapital where shop fronts were being masked in plywood bearing a uniform 'Business As Usual' slogan. The city is beginning to remind me of the seamier side of NYC and this jaunt was my escape from an ongoing nightmare situation.

Little did I know this was going to be a case of out of the frying pan into the fire and that very night Leeds itself was going to be in the grips of riotsville! We were warned at the hotel not to go out anywhere near the vicinity of Chapel Street.

We arrived almost at the same time as the group who were all pretty knackered after driving from Edinburgh. I only saw Blackmore briefly in the hotel coffee shop where he told me that the second night at Edinburgh Ingleston Hall was the best show they'd done so far and although Gillan didn't turn up to duet for an encore of 'Smoke On The Water' as Mr B vaguely hinted a week before, the evening did culminate with Blackmore presenting a Stratocaster to a fan club member.

Before our conversation could get any deeper we were accosted by what can only be described as a bizarre specimen of humanity who said he was a big fan of Blackmore but suddenly made us all suspicious of his motives when he claimed to have seen Deep Purple (the original line up) in Norway three years ago! This was a cue for the man in white (leather jacket that is) to make an exit. Later that night . . .

We connected up with ol' curly locks Rondinelli, Roger Glover and the girl backing singers (whose identity I shall keep shrouded in mystery until things become, uh, a little more permanent). Joe Lynn Turner showed up with a bottle of Remy and quite a subdued scene quickly transformed into Dante's Inferno. The alcohol hit my brain circuits like Titanic to an iceberg and we all drew the curtain on any form of sensibility or coherency, taking a Kamikazi dive into the land of unconscious.

The very next day . . .

"Coming for a game of football?", enquired a man in

black track suit. With a mouth like an unflushed toilet bowl I was actually headed for the lobby to find some sort of solution to a hangover that made my head feel like Rondinelli had done a six hour drum solo on the cranium from the inside.

"Come for a quick kick around," beamed Blackmore. Neither me or Halfin could turn down such an offer although we were dubious of the outcome. Outside we picked up half a dozen fans who had been hanging around the hotel for autographs and were totally speechless when they found themselves being whisked away by their idol.

In the conversation that followed Blackmore seemed curious and genuinely concerned about the employment situation. In the football match that followed both Halfin and myself proved we were a lost cause when it comes to fitness. Blackmore laughed and joked with the fans and . . .

WAITAMINUTE, this can't be the same Blackmore — I mean that one's a real mean, moody bastard, we all know that. Good God I couldn't imagine him conversing with such underlings as his fans. LAUGH, JOKE, nah this must have been a dream, acid flashback or something . . . take me to the show.

BEING NEAR his hometown Don Airey brought along various sets of relatives while Glover paced up and down the dressing room extolling the virtues of the new Tubes album. Rondinelli and Lynn Turner did a 'Blues Brother' skit while in the next room a couple of white candles gently flickered in the confines of Blackmore's room. Me and Halfin proceeded to polish off a bottle of scotch (a music biz ceremony, quite common y'know).

Down in't pit the audience were warming up and as soon as the perversely innocent voice of Judy Garland could be heard telling us we weren't in Kansas anymore (as if we didn't know) the crowd surged forward and when the group hit the stage the whole place transformed into a scene of mass hysteria as bodies pushed themselves against the railings.

The security guys reminded me of the characters in MASH at the frontline. Armed with buckets and sponges they made sure the pack of headbanging sardines kept cool while they pulled out the occasional person who passed out. Lynn Turner tried to persuade the crowd to back off, but they seemed to be in a trance of their own.

Meanwhile . . .

Up on stage it was evident something was very wrong. By the third number Blackmore and Rondinelli had walked offstage while Airey, Glover and Turner proceeded to go into a jam that disintegrated into a shambles.

No one knew what the F was going on, so I proceeded to go up into the dressing room where I found out the situation. Apparently Rondinelli's drum monitors had blow up which threw him completely out of time during 'Love's No Friend Of Mine'. To ensure they'd get fixed quickly Ritchie went up with Bobby. Now this may seem trivial and petty but one thing that Blackmore relies on throughout the set is the beat of a drum and at that moment of time if things hadn't have been sorted out I'm sure he would have called it a day and given the punters a refund. The bloke's a perfectionist and in the end it's for the benefit of the audience.

Finally the group went back on and although I didn't take detailed notes of the set, I could hear and feel a lot of aggression bouncing around the stage. THE EDGE.

The next night in Leeds more than made up for the previous night's debacle. Rainbow's audience seems to be growing, with a (to me) surprisingly large contingent of the fairer sex. Although they've probably gained some new faces due to their recent commercial successes the crowd is still mainly full of enough head banging savages to convince me the group hasn't sold out to singledom.

It was a good night with Halfin almost getting blown up when the bin he was given to stand on went off during the quiet section of 'Love's No Friend Of Mine'.

"The fact that Ritchie Blackmore's men sent the fans home all happy last night despite the notorious Queens Hall acoustics is proof of their magnetism and sheer professionalism" — Yorkshire Evening Post.

SOMETIME/somewhere on the road I managed to corner Blackmore for a chat.

How much do you want to tell me about Wembley (the infamous night Rainbow didn't reappear for an encore resulting with a couple of rows of chairs being trashed).

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RAINBOW

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"We didn't have a good night, we weren't going down too well with the audience. We were contracted to do one hour and ten minutes. I had just come offstage when Cozy had done his drum solo and he wasn't too pleased at the way the crowd had reacted to it. It was then we both agreed we didn't want to do an encore.

"So after the show I was confronted by the three of them, not Cozy, demanding to know why we hadn't done an encore. My reply was 'that's the way it is, if you don't like it, you can lump it' ". . .

The audience thought you were treating them like shit, basically.

"That's not true. I usually do an encore. The one time I don't everyone goes UH OH. Why should it be so predictable. The audience should respond and the band should be interested in playing."

Did you have any idea of what you did or didn't want after the departure of Graham Bonnet?

"I knew exactly what I wanted — a blues singer. Someone who sang with some feel, rather than just sing at the top of his voice. Joe fitted in really nicely, he's got lots of ideas about songs which I didn't have before."

Which you had when Ronnie (Dio) was in the band?

"Yes that's right. Graham wasn't an ideas man. I don't know what he was interested in, his favourite band being the Beach Boys more or less says it all, which is not what we're about. He did a very good job, but it was more like a clock-in job for him. Graham has only written a couple of songs in his life, there was no going back to the hotel for a jam. I asked him if he had written any songs he said yes but his old publishers had mucked him around so he wouldn't write again. We've all had problems with our publishers but that shouldn't stop you writing, when people let you down you can't just go into a corner and say 'I can't work anymore'."

So how did you come about getting Joe, didn't you think of having a big name at the time?

"No, I wanted somebody who was going to work and grow with the band. New faces and enthusiasm. I'm sick of seeing faces of people who are fed up with playing and just want the money — another day, another dollar. I wanted ideas, I didn't want people with technical ability and no ideas."

You have recently been accused of doing Foreigner type material.

"I like them, they write incredible songs and I am influenced by their singer. It's my type of music but I think they lack on the instrumental side. But that's only because I've played for so many years I expect a certain something from guitar players."

Why do you have such an empathy with singers?

"I don't know. I have an empathy with singers, drummers, violinists. I always make friends with the drummer. I think it's because don't have much competition. He has his thing I have mine. The drummer is for rhythm while I tkae the lead breaks. I usually fall out with the organist, we both always want to take the same lead breaks, it's treading on the same ground."

So why do you use keyboards, is it a necessity?

"I've always loved the sound of keyboards. I don't like rhythm guitarists and I don't like the sound of a three piece. I like the extra colour you get from keyboards. Even Hendrix and The Cream had that blandness in as much that you wanted to hear another instrument after 15 minutes."

Are you pleased with the new LP?

"Yes, as I was with the first Rainbow album, because they are so different. Those plus 'In Rock' and 'Machine Head' are my favourite albums. I wasn't too pleased with 'Stormbringer', I didn't like 'Who Do We Think We Are?', 'Fireball' was nothing, we were just scraping around, finding where we were.

"I really like 'Gates Of Babylon' on 'Long Live Rock And Roll' but there was also lots of padding, we were going through a lot of internal problems then. I was so into doing seances and conjuring up all sorts of demons, it affected everything we did. We did it in a haunted chateau in Paris, which didn't help very much."

You told me earlier on that you've got back into listening to heavy rock.

"Yes, late 60's and 70's unfortunately."

You still play a selection of your favourite songs before you go on stage.

"Yes, that inspires me — Arthur Brown, Jethro Tull, Cream, Strawbs, Hendrix. Some people say I'm not moving with the times, there is a quote 'I set my course by the stars, and not by the light of every passing ship'. People might say that I'm out of touch but I have heard new bands, then I go back to Floyd and Zeppelin, the old favourites. I would love to hear a band that could tear me away from it."

Is the media very important to you?

"Yes of course! Media needs bands and the bands need the media, although in my opinion the media needs the bands more. Journalists have now become stars themselves. I can understand why, they don't get paid very much."

A lot of people thought that when Cozy and Graham left it would be the end of Rainbow.

"Yes but that was just Cozy and Graham."

Yes but at that time you had done Donington, one of your biggest shows to date, and then the split occurred. Did you ever think, this is it?

"NO NEVER! If I thought that anyone wanted to leave and that would be bad for the band, then I would beg them to stay 'I'll pay you anything' — if you get my drift maaan."

Are you concerned with images, visually as a band?

"In this world now that is so concerned with images I don't get carried away or I would have four pretty boys, playing that sort of thing and making up for the state I'm in. As long as I can present myself in the best possible way, that is all I care about..."

THE LAST two nights we spent with Rainbow were in Leicester where they played two barnstormin' shows.

As the night turns into daylight I find myself lying on a bed, dazed, with a Sony Walkman and a set of headphones blaring out a cassette of the group's show in Rotterdam, kindly loaned to me by Blackmore. It's a rough and ready recording from a fan but even through the rowdy handclappin' and yelping from the British contingent it's potent enough to remind me of the last two shows at Leicester's Grand Hall.

As usual I am fighting against the odds to meet with a deadline so just picture a jet lagged corpse scrawling out notes on his pad frantically making an effort to conclude this piece with some iota of coherency.

OK, so here we go . . . .

As the tour builds up to its grand finale, culminating at the Hammy Odeon next Monday, the band are beginning to burn with some creative aggression.

Glover is a brilliant mediator/catalyst, his songwriting and production has taken the band out of their magical mystical phase and bought them right down to earth (if you'll s'cuse the pun). His bass playing and showmanship welds the whole group sound together and I'm really glad that Glover and themaninblack have got back together again.

Joe Lynn Turner steadily improves as each show goes by. His voice is as impressive as Dio's and Bonnet's but he still needs to enforce it with an equally strong image. Sometimes he tries too hard to impress the audience and that's when he gets too carried away and blows it. More gigs and a sharper insight into HM audiences is needed. Maybe when Turner and Blackmore start writing material together, the guy will find his feet.

Bobby Rondinelli has already won the confidence of the Rainbow fans which is hardly surprising, for apart from being an amazing drummer he is also an ace showman and I think we'll be seeing his Don Brewerlike boatrace for many years to come.

Ritchie is Cod (geddit).

Blackmore is still a dynamic performer and on a really good night no-one can come near to touching him on the six string axe attack. When he trashed his guitar on the last night I swear he got so carried away that he nearly fell off the PA system. If you can still keep that kind of rock and roll hard on after so many years, what can one say except — BRILL. *(Not exactly Pulitzer Prize stuff, eh Pete? — Ed.)*

My only real criticism is that I don't think the band need to play 'Smoke On The Water', they have enough heavy artillery in the form of back catalogue of material that is equally as powerful.

For the people who've been complaining that they don't do 'Stargazer' and other such epics, you have a humdinger of a surprise in a future tour planned. All in all this has been the most successful Rainbow jaunt I've been on and now all I want to see is some more new material and product.

Yup, that mean, moody bastard has hit the jackpot again, what else can one say?